



Dear Families:

Each day, more than 10,000 young people between the ages of 12–20 take their first drink.¹

The good news is that you, as a parent or caregiver, are still one of the most powerful influences on your child's behavior. And you have more influence on your child's values and decisions about drinking *before* he or she begins to use alcohol.² The key is to have a strong, trusting relationship with your child—one that is based on good communication. By developing open communication with your child, you will increase the likelihood that he or she will confide in you when faced with a serious issue or problem.³ **This begins with taking the time to talk.**

This Family Resource Guide is one part of *Reach Out Now: Start Talking Before They Start Drinking*, a program designed to build oral communication, critical-thinking, and life skills to help prevent underage drinking. Developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this program provides the information and techniques you need to open the doors to discussion with your child.

Charles G. Curie, SAMHSA Administrator
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

For more information about
underage drinking, visit
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov.

**START TALKING
BEFORE THEY
START DRINKING**
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

Six Key Actions Parents and Caregivers Can Take to Prevent Childhood Alcohol Use⁴

- 1. Establish and maintain good communication with your child.**
Reach Out Now strategy: Encourage conversation by actively listening to your child talk about things of interest to him or her. This paves the way for communication about topics that concern you.
- 2. Get involved and stay involved in your child's life.**
Reach Out Now strategy: Hold regular discussions about your child's school performance and activities, attend after-school events, and get to know your child's friends.
- 3. Make clear rules and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.**
Reach Out Now strategy: Develop clear family rules. Establish appropriate penalties and consequences for breaking the rules and enforce them consistently.
- 4. Be a positive role model.**
Reach Out Now strategy: Set a good example for your child. Talk to your child about the positive things you do that he or she might consider or follow.
- 5. Teach your child to choose friends wisely.**
Reach Out Now strategy: Talk to your child about the qualities that really count in a friend, such as being kind and trustworthy rather than being popular or "cool."
- 6. Monitor your child's activities.**
Reach Out Now strategy: Be aware of your child's plans and whereabouts.

1. National Survey on Drug Use & Health, 2004. 2. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), *Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol*, 2002. 3. Ibid. 4. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (SAMHSA/CSAP), *Keeping Youth Drug Free*, 2004.

"What Do You Know?"

New scientific research suggests that the effects of alcohol use during adolescence may be more far-reaching and permanent than once realized.⁵ Learn as much as you can about the facts and begin to discuss them openly with your child—before adolescence and before underage alcohol use begins.

The Opportunity

Each and every day is filled with unplanned moments that are perfect settings for serious communication between family members. A newspaper article or an event in your neighborhood may prompt one. The following is one example of a perfect opportunity to have an interactive family discussion about the physical effects of alcohol: **You're watching TV and the topic of alcohol comes up—for example, in a movie or advertisement.** You can also visit www.stopalcoholabuse.gov and play the "Start Talking About Drinking" public service ads (see the links on the right side of the Web page), and discuss them with your child.

Activity Directions

For Parent and Child:

- Below, under "Alcohol's Effects," work together and take turns creating a list of all the effects of alcohol you can both think of.

For Parent:

- Do an out-loud comparison of your list of alcohol's effects with the facts listed to the right. Work with your child to correct any errors in your list.
- Under "Reactions to the Facts," write down and discuss with your child what surprised you. What alarmed you? What reassured you?

Alcohol's Effects

Reactions to the Facts



The Facts: Alcohol's Effects⁶

- Alcohol affects your brain.** Drinking leads to a loss of coordination, poor judgment, slowed reflexes, distorted vision, memory lapses, and even blackouts.
- Alcohol affects your body.** It can damage every organ in your body. It is absorbed directly into your bloodstream and can increase your risk for a variety of diseases, including cancer.
- Alcohol affects your self-control.** It depresses your central nervous system, lowers your inhibitions, and impairs your judgment. Drinking can lead to risky behaviors, such as driving when you shouldn't.
- Alcohol can kill you.** Drinking large amounts at one time or very rapidly can cause alcohol poisoning, which can lead to coma or even death.
- Alcohol can hurt you—even if you're not the one drinking.** If you're around people who are drinking, you have an increased risk of being seriously injured, involved in car crashes, or affected by violence.

Alcohol and the Adolescent Brain⁷

Much brain development takes place during teenage years, and recent studies show that alcohol can affect the teenage brain differently than the adult brain.

- Adolescents are more sensitive to some of alcohol's effects on the brain.
- Repeated exposure to alcohol may alter the path of a teen's brain development.

5. American Medical Association, *Harmful Consequences of Alcohol Use on the Brains of Children, Adolescents, and College Students*, 2002. 6. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA), *Tips for Teens: The Truth About Alcohol*, 2004. 7. Aaron White, Ph.D., Dept. of Psychiatry, Duke University Medical Center, "Alcohol and the Adolescent Brain," 2004.

"What Do You Say?"

For many families, bringing up a sensitive subject is not easy. Parents may feel unsure about how to approach it, and children may try to avoid talking about it.⁸ This activity will guide your family through two sample dialogues to help set the stage for future discussions about alcohol. Before you begin, review the Communication Tips.

Activity Directions

For Parent and Child:

- Aloud and together, read **A. Productive Dialogue**. Then follow the instructions in **Write/Talk About It**.
- Follow with **B. Unproductive Dialogue**.
- Talk about your responses.
- Now, role-play another dialogue dealing with a similar topic.

A. Productive Dialogue

Parent: Sometimes kids your age get curious about alcohol. Have you ever wondered about it?

Child: Not really.

Parent: Some kids are so curious they take a drink on a dare. My friend Steve in junior high was like that. He would do anything on a dare. It made it hard to be friends with him.

Child: I don't know what to do about Kendra. Her Mom got mad and locked her out of the house so she went to a friend's house and had some drinks with alcohol in them.

Parent: I feel sorry for Kendra. I would never lock you out of our house.

Child: I know. I wonder why Kendra was drinking.

Write/Talk About It

For Parent and Child:

Respond to the following questions on separate pieces of paper, then discuss your answers.

- Why is this dialogue productive? Name and identify as many reasons as you can.
- What is the most important thing you learned when you read the dialogue?
- What is a question you have about talking or about alcohol?

B. Unproductive Dialogue

Parent: Isn't Kendra a friend of yours?

Child: Yes, sort of. Why?

Parent: She is in big trouble for drinking. You know our rules. Drinking is unacceptable. Friends who drink are not friends, and you can't be friends with her anymore. End of discussion.

Write/Talk About It

For Parent and Child:

Respond to these questions on separate pieces of paper, then discuss your answers.

- Why is this dialogue unproductive?
- How likely is it that this child will ever ask his or her parent a question about drinking?
- What would be a way to open up this discussion?

Communication Tips

The following techniques can help make you more comfortable and willing to talk openly to each other.

- Set up a quiet place to talk that will encourage open, private conversation.
- Choose a time to talk when you are both feeling relaxed.
- It's all in the delivery. Carefully consider your tone, your inflection, and the way you present what you want to say before you say it.
- Respect each other's thoughts, ideas, and viewpoints by listening without interrupting.
- Parents, be sure to encourage your child to tell you how she or he feels about what you are discussing.

"What Do You Do?"

It's not enough to tell your child to avoid alcohol—you also need to help your child figure out how, and how to communicate their thoughts and feelings to friends and classmates.⁹ Work together as a family to brainstorm ways that difficult situations can be handled. The following activity provides an example of a role-play dialogue involving an alcohol-related scenario.



Activity Directions

For Parent and Child:

- Take turns reading parts from the story below.
- Write down your responses to the questions in the **Write/Talk About It** section. Parents and children can use a separate piece of paper to write their responses.
- Talk together about your responses.

For Parent:

- Work with your child to role-play another dialogue dealing with a similar topic.

HOME ALONE: What Would You Do?

Narrator: Callie is in 5th grade, and Dawn is in 7th grade. They are alone at home after school for four hours, until their parents get home at 7 p.m.

Callie: "We call Mom and Dad as soon as we get home and then do our chores. Then I do my homework while I watch TV—it helps to have voices in the room with me. I don't pay any attention to Dawn."

Dawn: "I do my homework at school. When I get home I call my friends. Sometimes they come over, even though the rule is 'no friends in the house after school.' We drink wine coolers or beer. It helps pass the time. My friend's brother knows some older kids who give him liquor. I worry sometimes that Callie will tell on me."

Narrator: Callie recently discovered Dawn drinking with her friends. Dawn defends herself by saying she drinks because she's bored.

Dawn: "It's our parents' fault for working all the time!"

Callie: "That's dumb. Find something better to do than drink if you're bored."

Write/Talk About It

For Child:

- What would you do in Callie's situation? Share what you would do.
- How does Dawn defend drinking? What do you think of Callie's response? What should their parents do? Discuss your response with your parent.

For Parent and Child:

- List after-school alternatives to staying home alone offered in your community. What else could be done for kids who are alone after school? Discuss how using alcohol can impact their ability to achieve their goals in the future.

Sources for More Information

www.stopalcoholabuse.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):
www.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI):
(800) 729-6686,
www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA): www.niaaa.nih.gov

Cool Spot: www.thecoolspot.gov

Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free: www.alcoholfreechildren.org

U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools:
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html

National Family Partnership (NFP):
www.nfp.org

MADD: www.madd.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA): <http://cadca.org>

Pride Youth Programs, Inc.:
www.prideyouthprograms.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD):
www.ncadd.org

9. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), *Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol*, 2002.